

**The A, B, Cs of
Career Exploration and Planning
for High School Students**

Developed by

Junior Achievement (JA)
&

The National Career Development Association (NCDA)

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How would you feel if you could easily figure out your life, your friends, your parents! Should you get a job after high school or continue your education or training to better prepare you for a career?

Should you go to a four-year university or a community college or try some other type of training? Are you tired of school right now, or are you excited about a chance to continue your education to learn more? What are your options? How soon must you make up your mind?

What if you somehow GOT IT! and you instantly knew what's up! If you could figure out all the stuff that bothers you, would it make a difference in your life? It probably would, but that's unlikely to happen quickly.

Here are a few suggestions to move you in the right direction. Try them out and talk them over with your friends, your parents, and especially your favorite high school counselor or teacher. At least think about them a bit and have a discussion with someone who cares about you, your feelings, and your future.

The following three, easy activities will help clarify some of the things that may be on your mind these days. They are easy to do, especially with help from a professional counselor or teacher trained to work with young people.

Step One

A: Learn more about yourself—your interests, abilities, values, and career and life goals. Take time to develop your self-knowledge, including your interests, the various activities you enjoy, your special skills or certain talents you may be taking for granted. Think about your values, what's really important to you in life. Counselors and teachers really can help you learn more about yourself in a variety of ways. Interest inventories, small group discussions, or even classes focusing on these topics can be helpful. An individual discussion with a counselor or teacher also can guide you in the right direction.

Many older adults wish they had pursued their dreams when they were young. This is a great time in your life to explore your own dreams and learn how to act on them. Acquiring self-knowledge makes you feel better because you discover some surprisingly positive things about yourself. It can't be said often enough, school counselors and teachers are not only good at helping young people, they actually love doing it.

Reach out to one of your favorite counselors or teachers; ask them to show you how you can increase your self-knowledge.

Step Two

B: Learn more about the many exciting occupational opportunities in the world of work and the important educational and training options that best match your interests and career and life goals. So many different jobs, so much career information, and so many educational and training options can seem overwhelming. In fact, most people will have several jobs in various career areas during their lifetimes. Is that surprising? How

do you choose the ‘right ones’? Some people just want to escape dealing with all the information available and avoid exploring their career and life goals. Putting this off can seriously affect your future in a negative ways.

Having all the answers is not necessary right now, but it is important to at least start considering your options. Learn from experts who have amazing ways of organizing lots of information into easy-to-understand formats that make exploring fun. Computer programs, videos, books, and many games also can inform you about the variety of interesting occupations in the world of work, and the best educational and training options to prepare you for your favorite job.

Again, counselors and teachers can help you with this important step. You just need to ask.

Step Three

C: Learn how to evaluate vocational data so you can make smart decisions that will enable you to be happy and satisfied with your job. Choosing what will make you happy is a challenging and enjoyable step. It’s challenging because you need to take time to ask yourself key questions about what is or is not important to you. It’s enjoyable because when you take time to do this, you can see more clearly what’s best for you. Again, you don’t have to have all the answers at this time in your life, but if you examine and evaluate your options, you definitely will progress in pursuing your career and life goals. It would be great to be paid to do work you truly enjoy and also have time after work to do other activities, hobbies, or volunteer work. Having a well-balanced life is important.

Talk to someone who likes dealing with these topics and do some exploring on your own. Your school has many resources to offer, including highly skilled people who want to help you. Don’t hesitate to seek their assistance. One thing you have total control over is deciding to ask for help. Just do it! You’ll be glad you did.

Suggested follow-up activities:

Ask students to reflect on the following topics and write down their thoughts. Students should sit in pairs and respond to any two topics they can later share with their classmates. Then, bring all the students together in a large group to discuss their experiences and answer questions. It is recommended that you use these and other subjects that are appropriate for your students. Above all, show your enthusiasm for this activity that focuses on self-discovery, and your enthusiasm will spread to your students.

- 1) My three best personal qualities or characteristics:
- 2) My top three interests (likes, hobbies, and fun activities):

- 3) My top three dislikes, activities I really don't enjoy:
- 4) My top three abilities and skills, things I am very good at:
- 5) My top three life values (things that are very important to me in life):
- 6) My top three work values (things that are very important to me in a job):
- 7) When I am ready to work (providing I have the necessary training, knowledge, and abilities), I think I would like to do any of the following three jobs:
- 8) My favorite school subjects are:
- 9) My least favorite school subjects are:
- 10) To be a good student I think I need to improve in the following three areas:
- 11) I think the following three things would make the world a better place:
- 12) I think the following three things would make me happy in life:
- 13) Right now, I'm thinking about the following options after high school (working, continuing education or training, or other plans, such as traveling):
- 14) I have discussed or plan to discuss my goals after high school with the following people (friends, family, teachers, counselors, others):

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